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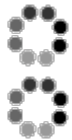
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[Film In Focus](#) > [blog](#) > Toronto Day Two

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# Toronto Day Two

By [Peter Bowen](#)

September 09, 2008 @ 08:23 am



For me, blustery days threatening rain are always welcome during a film festival. When the weather turns, best to turn into a movie theater. Of course, such behavior can always feel a bit escapist. When 9/11 hit, I was in Toronto watching Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding*. After the film, out in the lobby of the Varsity theater, all the TVs were turned to CNN images of smoke pouring out of the World Trade Towers. Unable to make sense of the hundreds of reports that CNN was picking up on, I headed back into the theaters. By the time, I came back out all

hell had broken out.

## Hunger

It is not that politics don't intrude onto the movie screen. It is just they rarely threaten. Today I book-cased the day with two remarkable, very different political films. In the morning, Ari Folman's *Waltz with Bashir* is the seemingly contradictory animated documentary. Recounting the directors search to find the truth behind a series of troubling dreams, the films goes not so much into the heart of history, as into the personal unconscious that wants to forget the truth of what actually happened. In the evening was Steve McQueen's *Hunger*, a historical drama about IRA activist Bobby Sands and the 1981 hunger strikes. McQueen, who comes from the world of visual art rather than film, brings a cinematic style that is utterly meticulous in its presentation. Every shot, every fleck of paint, every prosthetic wound on the prisoner's bodies seems thought out and intentionally. While the subject matter, still fresh in the mind of many, is unavoidably sensational--how can you be impartial in showing prisoners smear their own shit on their walls and refuse any assistance to keep their protest alive--the film's sensibility ends up as being as a classic as any Greek drama. Less about the political strategies of the IRA, as about the inevitable clash between one man's unyielding need to change the world and the world's ultimate indifference to his hunger.

In the this political sandwich was a filler of lovely family melodramas. Hirokazu Kore-eda's elegantly composed still life of family trauma *Still Walking*. Clearly one of Japan's great humanists, Kore-eda proudly picks up the mantle of Ozu with this story a Japanese family who reunites one weekend to remember one's son who tragically died years ago. Each character is as profoundly etched as any in Ozu or Renoir; each a bundle of contradictions and emotions that simultaneously satirize and exalt the human condition. Much less complex, much more sweet is the Ella Lemhagen's , a predictably touching tale of a married gay male couple in Sweden who believe they are adopting a one and half year old baby, only to learn much to their dismay of the adoption placement agency's unfortunate typo. (I am sure you can figure out the rest.)



Neutral Milk Hotel's Jeff Mangum in plaid



Focus Features party scene

The same delicious contrasts found in the festival films is also found in the social life. Two parties. One an after party for Astra Taylor's thinking doc *Examined Life* in a walk up bar in the middle of non-descript street off of Chinatown. Inside a sad tray of toast and forlorn pieces of fruit. But also an amazing spirit and excitement. And a true treat. Jeff Mangum, the reclusive leader of the ground-breaking indie rock band Neutral Milk Hotel, sat down to play a few songs, a performance that electrified the crowd who realized they were suddenly witnessing musical history. Later, among the security controlled, spot-lit downtown Toronto clubs, the Focus Features party for *Burn After Reading* seemed to capture the most attention and longline of paparazzi. Held at Spice Route, an airy, flowing space offering trays and tables of Asian-inflected

food and sofas appointed with special *Burn After Reading* pillows. A different energy, an exiting space with Tilda Swinton gracing all with her smile and fabulous get up and Brad Pitt in a booth talking away all night. Both lovely. Both Different.

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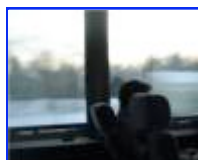
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Peter saw his first movie when he was just a little boy, and has never gotten over that experience.

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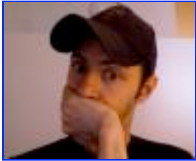
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